

Coalition Government

A coalition government is a form of government in which political parties cooperate to form a government. The usual reason for such an arrangement is that no single party has achieved an absolute majority after an election.

In this article, candidates will learn about Coalition government within the context of the IAS Exam.

Meaning of Coalition Government

The term 'coalition' is derived from the Latin word '*coalitio*' which means 'to grow together'. Thus, technically, coalition means the act of uniting parts into one body or whole. Politically, coalition means an alliance of distinct political parties

Coalition usually occurs in modern parliaments when no single political party can muster a majority of votes. Two or more parties, who have enough elected members between them to form a majority, may then be able to agree on a common programme that does not require too many drastic compromises with their individual policies and can proceed to form a government.

Features of Coalition Government

The features of a Coalition Government are highlighted below:

1. Coalition is formed for the sake of reward, material or psychic
2. A coalition implies the existence of a least two partners
3. The underlying principle of a coalition system stands on the simple fact of temporary conjunction of specific interest.
4. Coalition politics is not a static but a dynamic affair as coalition players and groups can dissolve and form new ones
5. The keynote of coalition politics is compromise and rigid dogma has no place in it.
6. A coalition works on the basis of a minimum programme, which may not be ideal for each partner of the coalition.
7. Pragmatism and not ideology is the hall-mark of coalition politics. In making political adjustments, principles may have to be set aside.
8. The purpose of a coalition adjustment is to seize power.

In India, coalitions have come up before or after elections. The pre-poll coalition is considered advantageous as it provides a common platform for all parties to woo the electorate on the basis of a joint manifesto. A post-election union is intended to enable constituents to share political power and run the government.

Formation of Coalition Governments in India

The table below highlights the Coalition Government formed in India in the ensuing years:

Formation of Coalition Governments in India (1977-Present)		
Period	Coalition	Prime Minister (Party)
1977-1979	Janata Party	Morarji Desai (Congress (O))
1979-1980	Janta Party (Secular)	Charan Singh (Janata (S))
1989-1990	National Front	V.P Singh (Janata Dal)
1990-1991	Janata Dal (Socialist) or Samajwadi Janata Party	Chandra Shekar (Janata Dal (S) or Samajwadi Party)
1996-1997	United Front	H..D Deve Gowda (Janata Dal)
1997-1998	United Front	I.K Gujral (Janata Dal)
1997-1998	BJP-led Coalition	A.B. Vajpayee (BJP)
1999-2004	National Democratic Alliance (NDA)	A.B. Vajpayee (BJP)
2004-2009	United Progressive Alliance (UPA)	Manmohan Singh (Congress)
2009-2014	United Progressive Alliance - II (UPA-II)	Manmohan Singh (Congress)
2014-2019	National Democratic Alliance (NDA)	Narendra Modi (BJP)
2019-present	National Democratic Alliance (NDA)	Narendra Modi (BJP)

Merits and Demerits of Coalition Government

The merits and demerits of a coalition government is highlighted in the table below:

Demerits and Merits of Coalition Government	
Merits	Demerits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is an accommodation of diverse interests in the functioning of the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They are unstable or prone to instability. The difference of opinion among coalition

government.

- A coalition government acts as a channel to meet the expectations and redress the grievances of different groups
- India is a highly diversified country. There are different cultures, languages, castes, religions and ethnic groups. This means that the coalition government's more representative in nature and reflects the popular opinion of the electorate
- A coalition government comprises different political parties having their own ideologies or agendas. But the government policy requires the concurrence of all the coalition partners. Therefore, a coalition government leads to consensus-based politics
- Coalition politics strengthens the federal fabric of the Indian political system. This is because a coalition government is more sensitive and responsive to regional demands
- A coalition government reduces the chances of despotic rule. This is due to the reduced domination of a single political party in the functioning of the government. All the members of the coalition participate in the decision making.

members leads to the collapse of the government

- Leadership of the Prime Minister is a principle of parliamentary form of government. This principle is curtailed in a coalition government as the Prime Minister is required to consult the coalition partners before taking any major decisions.
- The Steering Committee or the Coordination Committee of the coalition partners acts as the 'Super-Cabinet' and thereby it undermines the role and position of the cabinet in the functioning of the government machinery
- There is a possibility of the smaller constituents of the coalition government playing the role of a 'king-maker'. They demand more than strength in the Parliament
- The leaders of regional parties bring in the regional facts in the national decision-making. They pressurise the central executive to act on their lines; otherwise, they would threaten to withdraw from the coalition
- The members of the coalition governments do not assume responsibility for the administrative failures and lapses. They could play blame games and there by escape from collective and individual responsibilities